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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VISITS PEPFAR USG-SUPPORTED HIV/AIDS SITES

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SUMMARY

¶1. On November 27, Ambassador June Carter Perry and a team of U.S. Government HIV/AIDS program staff, including Peace Corps and RHAP Pretoria, and CDC Lesotho, visited multiple PEPFAR-supported programs in the District of Leribe. During the four sites reviewed, the Ambassador offered remarks emphasizing the ABC approach, women's rights and the democratic process in light of pending national elections. She traveled to remote villages and met with caregivers. END SUMMARY.

PEPFAR PROGRAMS

¶2. In August 2006, the United States Government committed US\$ 7 million to help Lesotho fight HIV/AIDS under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Following up on this support, Ambassador Perry visited multiple program sites in the District of Leribe on November 27, 2006. The Ambassador was also accompanied by a team of USG HIV/AIDS program staff from CARE Lesotho-South Africa, Population Services International (PSI), PACT, and Peace Corps Lesotho.

Progress to-date of Visited Programs

¶A. CARE

CARE Lesotho-South Africa operates the CARE Letsema Integrated Community Home Based Care (CHBC) Project. The long-term goal of this project is to strengthen the ability and capacity among families and communities to provide integrated care and support for AIDS-affected households. CARE aims to do this by: 1) strengthening CHBC providers, reaching both people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and/or orphans and vulnerable children (OVC); 2) providing financial, technical and organizational capacity to six (6) local CBO implementing partners; and 3) strengthening economic coping mechanisms and social safety nets within affected and vulnerable households through the establishment of voluntary savings and loan (VS&L) groups amongst care givers. CARE is currently in partnership with local grantees which have since been provided with organizational development capacity strengthening. The project has provided 5,948 individuals with HIV-prevention education, focused on abstinence and "be faithful" messages; 1,444 individuals are being provided with home-based care services; and 1,292 orphans and vulnerable children are being provided with care and support services. During a dialogue with the Ambassador, caregivers stated the

challenges they face, including stigmatization of patients and lack of sufficient stipends. The CHBC often use their own meager funds to feed and transport patients.

B. PACT

With support from a grant signed this month with USAID/RHAP, PACT operates a community-based support group for people within the Leribe district living with HIV/AIDS. Three satellite groups exist within Leribe in addition to the main group based in Motebang Hospital where U.S. funded personnel and a Peace Corps Volunteers work collaboratively with the GOL and a Canadian medical team. The satellite groups are situated in Peka, a rural village; Maputsoe, an urban border-crossing hub with a migrant/textile worker population; and Mamohau, a mountainous village.

In addition to these support services, PACT currently runs Gardens of Hope, a permaculture garden located at the Motebang Hospital for growing medicinal herbs and marketing them to the sick people who come to the clinic. They are also engaged in a project called SOLID Leribe. The project's key objectives are the establishment of five new HIV/AIDS support groups in Leribe; the use of public gatherings to ensure access to HIV counseling and testing; training of group members to provide a range of care and support services for existing and newly established support groups; initiation of a treatment adherence support program in Leribe that is clinic-based; and the development of an HIV Support Center to be based at the hospital clinic.

Under a three-year grant signed in April 2006, PACT with support from USAID/RHAP Society of Women Against AIDS in Africa-Lesotho (SWAALES), provides care and support services to 300 Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) in ten villages in the Leribe and Maseru Districts. Members are taught how to care for those who have patients (caring for the caregivers) and to provide home-based care and counseling. The main care and support services provided through the program are tailored to meet the educational, health and psychological needs of children. To

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date, twenty community-based "monitors" have been trained to provide care and support to OVC; 385 children have been provided with nutritional, educational and psycho-social support services; and several OVC have been referred to the health center for health care needs.

Peace Corps, SSH and AGSP Sites

C. Molapo High School

A US Peace Corps Volunteer has been able to assist Molapo High School in a sustainable agricultural/permaculture project through PEPFAR-supported VAST grants. The funds paid for an irrigation system and shade structures for the school garden. Due to these improvements, the high school has been able to conserve water for irrigation and will be able to have commercial vegetable production and a fruit tree plantation. They have also established a greenhouse for growing seedlings, which will help the OVC attending this institution to generate income. The income already generated from this project has helped to pay school fees for over 85 OVC. The Ambassador was greeted by the principal and also presented supplies to one of the Ambassador's Girls' Scholarship students there.

D. Phelisanong Pitseng with the Disabled

Phelisanong Pitseng with the Disabled was funded under the Ambassador's Special Self-Help program to construct a handicrafts center in support of the needs of people with disabilities and also a building used to provide food and shelter for this group of victims of discrimination. The main objective of the group is to improve the lives of its members and community by supporting and developing skills and creating

income-generating activities. A PCV has assisted the group in strengthening its administrative skills, community organizing, skill sharing, marketing, agricultural skills (food security) as well as strategies for advocacy. The ages of the group members range from 4 to 40 years and there are 30-40 live-in members, while the total including members from other villages is 500. The Chieftaness of the area granted land for the project and she offered welcoming remarks to the Ambassador who praised the courage of the villagers and the quality of their products.

Counseling and Testing

13. PSI has been involved in prevention and Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) in Lesotho. In 2001, PSI received funding from USAID to establish a stand-alone platform in Lesotho and to launch condoms. The program is focused on high-risk Basotho in high-risk areas (Maseru and Maputsoe). In 2004, also, through funding from the Regional HIV/AIDS Program for Southern Africa (RHAP), PSI expanded into Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT), opening three centers in Maseru, Maputsoe and Mafeteng sites; the first three sites in the New Start network. In March 2005, PSI received funding from CDC to open two more VCT centers; in Qacha's Nek and Butha Buthe. PSI currently provides the following services: Social marketing of condoms and VCT; site-based and mobile VCT; post-test clubs; peer education and training; training in basic HIV/AIDS, counseling and testing. The training also emphasizes abstinence as a preventive mechanism, a point reinforced by the Ambassador.

COMMENT

14. Several US-based international and local organizations have committed to support Lesotho's efforts by providing multi-faceted expertise in the combat of the pandemic, namely, CARE, USAID, CDC, PACT, PSI, and Peace Corps. Likewise, the local groups have indicated a willingness to grasp the intervention hitherto provided. The Government of Lesotho also has indicated a strong leadership role in the fight against this disease. There is a remarkable and marked response from all parties involved, but it is clear more capacity building and funding are needed. END COMMENT.

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PERRY